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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the results of three investigations of the effects of marathon Gestalt workshops on the measured self-actualization of volunteer, college student participants. In the first study, 10 students participated in a weekend workshop at the university counseling center. Subjects completed the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) before the workshop and again four days later. Significant positive pre-post changes in mean scores were observed on seven of twelve POI scales for the experimental group. A nontreatment group controlled for sex, age, and college class demonstrated no significant changes. In Study II, 36 college student volunteers were randomly assigned by sex to experimental and control conditions. The experimental group participated in a continuous 24-hour Gestalt workshop and completed the POI before, four days after, and six months after the workshop. Findings revealed significant positive pre-post changes on 11 of 12 POI scales. Posttest-followup comparisons indicated that these changes persisted over time and that additional gain was achieved on several POI scales. No significant differences were observed in control group mean scores for pre- and posttests. Study III was a replication of the second study with an increased number of subjects, and the results were highly similar to those in Study II. Results of these three studies suggest that marathon Gestalt workshops appear to foster increased self-actualization in volunteer college students. Suggestions are offered for future research. (Author)

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Measured Changes in Self-Actualization Following Marathon Gestalt Workshops

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My colleagues and I at the Bowling Green State University Counseling Center have been involved for the past eight years in the design and implementation of what we have called the "growth center" model for the provision of counseling and psychological services in educational institutions (Foulds & Guinan, 1969). The growth center is a proactive campus agency that provides a wide variety of educative, developmental, and remedial services designed to foster increased levels of self-actualization and human effectiveness, expansion of human awareness and human experiencing, and the maximum development of human potential. The center offers a broad spectrum of counseling and psychological services (including the traditional and reactive ones of consultation, assistance in educational and career-vocational planning and decision-making, crisis counseling, and psychotherapy) intended to assist students to mobilize their creative energies and to achieve more effective and more satisfying personal, social, educational, and vocational development.

During this eight year period, we have been offering (as one of many forms of "growth" programs available on a regular basis) marathon Gestalt workshops to our students as one method for fostering the psychological development and personal learning of "normal," growth-seeking college students. These workshops are a specific form of what are commonly called "growth groups" (we offer a variety of forms) and are conducted for a "one shot" continuous period of time consisting of 12, 14, 16, or 24 hours. During the workshops we follow the practices and principles of Gestalt therapy and the Gestalt orientation to personal growth as developed by Laura and Fritz Perls (1969a, 1969b, 1973) and their many students. Gestalt therapy envelopes a theory of human development, psychopathology, and psychotherapy, as well as a therapeutic methodology and a philosophy of life. The Gestalt workshop is designed to facilitate individual growth in a group setting. The goal of this approach is to foster the fullest possible development of the individual and his human potential. Key concepts include: (a) awareness of now and how (the ongoing process of experiencing and behaving); (b) personal responsibility (and response-ability); (c) integration (the achievement of self-acceptance, authenticity, and wholeness); (d) fluid figure-ground relationships (leading to a process of smooth and efficient gestalt formation and destruction); (e) organismic self-regulation (the natural tendency of the organism towards growth and satisfaction of important needs - the homeostatic principle); and (f) maturation (the transition from environmental support to increased self-support - not self-sufficiency). A description of the process of the Gestalt growth group or workshop is available elsewhere (Foulds, 1972a, 1974b), as are descriptions of the many innovative programs we have initiated at our counseling center over the past years (Foulds, 1972b; Foulds & Guinan, 1970).

Self-Actualization

Self-actualization is a construct that has been used by numerous personality theorists. Maslow (1962) has defined self-actualization as the ability of a person to bring his powers together in a particularly efficient and

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intensely enjoyable way and as a state in which a person is more integrated and less split, living more fully in the here-and-now, more self-supporting, more self-accepting, more open to his experience, more idiosyncratic, more perfectly expressive or spontaneous, more fully functioning, more creative, more ego-transcending, more independent of his lower needs, more truly himself, more perfectly actualizing his potentials, closer to the core of his being, positively healthy, highly evolved and matured. Shostrom (1966) has constructed the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), a diagnostic instrument designed to assess the values and self-percepts believed to be associated with self-actualization, to measure important dimensions of this personality construct. This inventory consists of 150 two-choice, paired-opposite value and behavior judgment items. The items are scored twice, first for two major scales which include all test items with no item overlap, Inner Directed (I) with 127 items and Time Competent (Tc) with 23 items, and second for 10 subscales each measuring some conceptually relevant aspect of self-actualization. These include Self-Actualizing Value (SAV), Existentiality (Ex), Feeling Reactivity (Fr), Spontaneity (S), Self-Regard (Sr), Self-Acceptance (Sa), Nature of Man Constructive (Nc), Synergy (Sy), Acceptance of Aggression (A), and Capacity for Intimate Contact (C). The values and goals of Gestalt therapy seem to be somewhat congruent with the model of the "self-actualizing person" followed in the development of the POI. Therefore, this diagnostic instrument may be useful in determining the impact or effects of Gestalt workshops on growth-seeking college students. The following three studies were conducted to investigate this hypothesis.

A Review of the Research Findings

Gestalt workshops or growth groups were provided for students on a regular basis in two forms, the ongoing weekly meeting over six to nine weeks and the time-extended or continuous marathon intensive workshop. The workshops were announced in the campus newspaper, in classes, and through widely distributed mimeographed sheets and/or brochures that described all the growth and learning experiences to be offered by the counseling center during that particular quarter. All volunteers participated in a 15-30 minute pregroup interview with one of the workshop leaders to screen for severe psychological malfunctioning, to assess motivation for personal growth, to describe the goals and orientation of the workshop and the kinds of methods and techniques that would be used, to share assumptions regarding the responsibilities of group members and leaders, to assure the availability of followup contact if desired, to explain the design of and request the person's cooperation in the research study, and to provide an opportunity for the exploration and expression of thoughts and feelings concerning the event and for making a personal decision with commitment regarding participation. While we have studied the effects of marathon Gestalt workshops on many different dimensions of human personality (see Foulds, 1974a), the present paper will review only those that focused on the self-actualization dimension.

Study I

Guinan and Foulds (1970) studied the effects of a weekend marathon Gestalt growth group on the measured self-actualization of "normal" college students. Ten students (six males and four females, ranging from freshmen to seniors) volunteered to participate in this marathon that met in the counseling center from 7:00 p.m. Friday to 8:00 p.m. Sunday (with two sleep breaks) for a total

of 30 hours meeting time. Subjects completed the POI immediately before the group, and posttests were administered four days later. For comparison purposes, an equal number of subjects was selected for a nontreatment group controlled for sex, age, and college class. The control subjects had volunteered to "be in an experiment."

An analysis of the data revealed that all 12 mean scores of the experimental group changed in a positive direction following the group experience, with significant changes ($p < .05$) in mean scores on 7 of the 12 POI scales. Change beyond the .001 level was observed on the Inner Directed, Self-Acceptance, and Capacity for Intimate Contact scales. None of the mean scores for the control group changed significantly. Such findings suggest that the Gestalt marathon group may be a productive method for fostering increased levels of self-actualization and personal growth of college students. Since the subjects in the experimental and control groups in this study were not randomly assigned from the same subject pool, however, some caution must be exercised in interpreting the results. We also suggested that this study be replicated with a larger sample to more adequately test the self-actualization hypothesis.

Study II

After conducting numerous marathon Gestalt workshops of varying time structures and gathering a variety of data on their differential effects, we decided that the "one shot," continuous workshop seemed to be the most potent form and to foster the greatest amount of positive change. Therefore we halted our weekend format and continued to conduct continuous marathon Gestalt workshops of 12, 14, 16, and 24 hours duration.

Foulds and Hannigan (1974) improved on the research design of the previous study, increased the number of subjects, and examined both the immediate and the long-term effects of a 24-hour continuous marathon Gestalt workshop on this same dimension of personality, self-actualization. In this study, 36 college student volunteers (18 males and 18 females) from the same subject pool were randomly assigned by sex to experimental and control conditions to form two subgroups containing 9 males and 9 females each. The subjects ranged from freshmen to seniors and from 17-22 years of age. A toss of a coin decided which group would be the treatment group, subjects were notified of their status, and those in the control group were assured participation in a second marathon workshop to be held one week later. The workshop was held in the counseling center from 12 noon Friday till 12 noon Saturday and was conducted by two experienced practitioners of Gestalt therapy. The group remained intact the entire time, and food was delivered when a consensus to eat was reached. Experimental subjects responded to the POI immediately before the 24-hour Gestalt workshop, four days later, and again six-months later. Control subjects completed the pre- and posttesting at the same points in time but were not tested six-months later, unfortunately, for they had participated in the second marathon (as promised) and thus lost their control status at that time.

Because of considerable item overlap and high intercorrelations among some of the POI subscales (they were not conceptualized as representing independent dimensions), the sum of the Time Competent and Inner Directed raw scores (Tc plus I) was considered the overall measure of self-actualization and thus received the primary emphasis in this study. This procedure was adopted as a result of Damm's (1972) finding that among a number of different methods studied,

this was the best method for deriving an overall measure of self-actualization on the POI (nothing was gained by converting raw scores into standard scores before combining scales). The scores on the 10 subscales were considered to be difficult to interpret and thus secondary in importance.

An analysis of the data yielded the following findings. A significant positive pre-post change occurred in the experimental group mean score on the overall measure of self-actualization, Tc plus I, t (17) = 8.01, $p < .001$, two-tailed test. All 18 subjects in this group scored higher on posttests. Results of other pre-post comparisons disclosed that significant positive changes ($p < .05$, two-tailed test) occurred on 11 of 12 individual POI scales. Changes in control group mean scores were nonsignificant. A comparison of posttest and followup scores for the experimental group revealed that not only did the pre-post gain persist over that time period, but an additional significant increase in overall level of self-actualization was achieved, t (17) = 3.58, $p < .01$, two-tailed test. When posttest and followup scores on the POI subscales were compared, all mean scores but one (Nc) changed in a positive direction, and significant changes ($p < .05$) were observed on 7 of the 12 subscales. Posttest-followup gain was achieved by 13 subjects on the overall measure (Tc plus I), while 4 subjects scored lower and one remained the same. Thus, not only did the pre-post changes persist over time, there also seemed to be a delayed or "sleeper" effect in that significant changes occurred within the six-month followup period.

The findings of this study confirmed the hypothesis that subjects would score significantly higher on a measure of self-actualization following the continuous 24-hour marathon Gestalt workshop. Some of the long-term effects results, however, were unexpected and quite surprising. We had anticipated that the gain in measured self-actualization of some subjects might be short-lived and they would regress to pretest states, while the change and personal growth of other subjects would be greatest in the period of time immediately following the workshop experience, with the marathon Gestalt treatment giving the initial impetus to change and/or to the awareness that additional change is possible, necessary, or desired. These results would tend to balance each other producing no significant posttest-followup change. As the data clearly demonstrated, however, this prediction was not supported. Since the control group was not also tested at the six-month followup point, this part of the study must be considered exploratory in nature, and caution must be used in interpreting the findings.

Study III

Because of the unexpected results from the posttest-followup comparisons in the previous investigation, a replication study was undertaken with an increased number of subjects to further test the self-actualization hypothesis (Foulds & Hannigan, 1975). This time 72 volunteer subjects were randomly assigned by sex to treatment and nontreatment groups (36 subjects in each). The treatment group was then further divided into two subgroups of equal size containing 9 males and 9 females each. Each treatment group participated in a 24-hour marathon Gestalt workshop (held on successive weekends) at the counseling center from 12 noon Friday till 12 noon Saturday. Both workshops were conducted by the same two experienced practitioners of Gestalt therapy. As in the previous study, experimental subjects were tested with the POI before their group, five days later, and six-months later. Half of the control group (randomly selected by sex) was pre- and posttested at the same times the first experimental group was tested; the remaining control subjects were tested at the same times as the

second experimental group. Control subjects did not complete the followup testing, however, for they had also participated in the same type of workshop on later weekends that same quarter and thus lost their control status. Again the control group was not available for post-followup comparisons due to our service commitments and ethical considerations.

Treatment effects were examined by computing group means, standard deviations, and two-tailed *t* tests of significance of difference between correlated means. The stronger two-tailed test was used (in spite of a predicted direction of change) due to the degree of intercorrelation among some POI scales and the statistical problems associated with performing multiple *t* tests. As predicted in the primary hypothesis of this study, the findings revealed a significant positive pre-post change in the experimental group mean score on the overall measure of self-actualization, Tc plus I, t (35) = 6.79, $p < .001$. Of the 36 subjects in this group, 34 scored higher on posttests. The other two subjects scored lower by 2 and 4 points of a total of 150. No significant change occurred in control group mean score on this overall measure. The findings also disclosed positive pre-post changes beyond the .001 level of statistical significance on 9 of 12 individual POI subscales (Tc, I, SAV, Fr, S, Sr, Sa, A, and C) and beyond the .01 level on one additional scale (Ex). Control group mean scores failed to change significantly on any of these scales.

Comparisons between posttest and six-month followup scores of the experimental group revealed that the pre-post gain in the overall measure (Tc plus I) persisted over that time period and, in fact, once more an additional gain in overall level of self-actualization was realized, t (35) = 2.58, $p < .05$. Posttest-followup gain was achieved by 27 subjects on this scale, with the other 9 subjects scoring lower, but only 2 subjects' scores (of the total 36) regressed to pretest levels. Thus, the pre-post gain did persist over time, with additional gain being achieved as in a delayed "sleeper" effect. Comparisons between posttest and followup scores on the 12 POI subscales disclosed that all mean scores but one (Fr) changed in a positive direction, with significant changes ($p < .05$) on two scales (I and Sr). Unfortunately, the lack of followup data on the control group due to our service commitments and ethical considerations requires that some caution be used in interpreting these followup results.

A comparison of experimental and control group pretest scores revealed a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the two groups on only one scale (Sy), with the experimental group scoring higher. When posttest scores of these two groups were compared, experimental group mean scores were significantly higher on the Tc plus I scale ($p < .001$) and on 11 of 12 POI subscales ($p < .05$) with Nc being the exception. Possible sexual differences in the data were also explored. The pretest scores of the 36 male and 36 female subjects were compared, resulting in a significant sexual difference on only one scale (Sr) on which males scored significantly higher ($p < .05$). There were no significant sexual differences within the experimental group on either pre- or posttests. All pretest mean values were in the normal range of self-actualization when compared with those reported by Shostrom (1966) for a normative group of 2607 college students

The findings of this replication study are highly similar to those reported earlier by Foulds and Hannigan (1974). Significant positive pre-post changes in the measured self-actualization of college student participants were observed

in both studies following 24-hour marathon Gestalt workshops. In addition, these changes were found to persist over six-month followup periods, with some additional gain achieved when posttest-followup comparisons were made. Such findings suggest that the 24-hour continuous marathon Gestalt workshop may be an effective method for fostering the personal growth of college students, that such gains are maintained over time, and that this form of growth group may also stimulate additional benefits that are reaped by participants during a period of time following the workshop. That is, the marathon Gestalt workshop may facilitate an initial impetus to change that is reflected in pre-post comparisons and also some form of delayed sleeper effect that produces or leads to additional change over time after participants become more aware that additional change is possible, necessary, or desired. Since the control groups participated in later marathon groups and lost their control status, this part of the study must be considered exploratory in nature.

Discussion

A number of conclusions can be generated from the findings of the three studies reviewed above. First of all, marathon Gestalt workshops seem to foster positive changes in level of self-actualization as measured by the POI. Of the two time-structures under study, the 24-hour continuous workshop appears to promote the greater amount of change in growth-seeking college students. (We are just completing a study of the comparative effects of 16-hour and 24-hour marathon Gestalt workshops.) This form of Gestalt workshop is effective with as many as 18 participants (we have led these workshops with as many as 24 members). In addition to immediate positive effects, the 24-hour marathon Gestalt workshop appears to stimulate additional growth during the six-month period of time following the group. Kimball and Gelso (1974), Reddy (1973), and Mc Cardel and Murray (1974) have reported similar followup findings that suggested a possible delayed sleeper effect. Reddy (1973) concluded that participants may learn and exhibit change at different rates and at different times.

A major problem with followup studies is that the use of a control group over an extended period of time to make comparisons with members of an experimental group is questionable. First of all, a service agency has considerable difficulty in fulfilling its service commitments and implementing a research design with this type of control group. To deny treatment or a service to students or even to delay it for a prolonged period of time while they serve as control subjects is unacceptable to me. Secondly, LeMay and Christensen (1968) have demonstrated that the research design of randomly assigning subjects to experimental and control conditions is not free of contamination. Control subjects who request assistance in increasing their levels of personal and social functioning and then are denied help while they serve as control subjects in a research study frequently seek out some alternate form of assistance which is unknown to the investigator, thus invalidating their nontreatment control status and distorting experimental evidence. Oh, the "uncontrollable nature of control groups!"

While the findings from the studies reviewed herein are somewhat impressive, a number of limitations are apparent. The effects, if any, of test reactivity or response bias and pretest-treatment interaction on the results are unknown. We are presently analyzing the data from a further test of the self-actualization hypothesis using the Solomon four-group research design in

order to explore this issue. The effects of both subjects' and leaders' expectations are also unknown. All subjects participated in a pregroup screening interview and were presented information that could have created particular response sets that later influenced their behavior in the workshop and hence the outcome. Future investigations might control for such factors to test for any possible effects. Also, the findings are the result of the self-reports of participants and, of course, are subject to the limitations imposed by that assessment method. In this regard, the reader may be interested to know that the findings of several investigations suggest that the POI is remarkably unsusceptible to dissimulation (Foulds & Warehime, 1971; Warehime & Foulds, 1973; Warehime, Routh, & Foulds, 1974). The findings of these studies suggest that this measure of self-actualization is superior to most other self-report personality instruments as an outcome measure in group studies. They also provide additional support for our conclusions regarding our outcome findings.

One further limitation is that the reviewed studies were not designed to isolate and identify the particular process variables (techniques, methods, etc.) and their interaction effects that were the primary contributors to the observed effects. We must now "tease out" those aspects of the process of the Gestalt workshop that are most essential to the discovered effects. Research designs that control for specific methods and procedures (as well as possible placebo effects and effects of nonspecific therapeutic factors) remain to be implemented in future investigations. Member characteristics that are important moderators of workshop outcome might also be identified. We are currently studying dogmatism, social desirability responding, and locus of control as possible member moderators. This information may help us to learn what kinds of individuals profit most from a marathon Gestalt workshop and those, if any, for whom this form of group experience is contraindicated. The reader is also advised that the generalization of the present findings are necessarily limited to growth-seeking college students participating in marathon Gestalt workshops. The effects on other populations are presently unknown.

Our research is evolving from the simplistic to the more sophisticated - the "perfect" study has not yet been done. We seek to achieve step-by-step, cumulative progress in our experimentation efforts. We recognize that hypotheses can never be confirmed with absolute confidence, and we seek to eliminate as many rival or alternate explanations of our data as possible. This is the way of research. The first step in our systematic research program, Phase 1, has been to determine what kinds of personality and behavior changes occur following marathon Gestalt workshops. Phase 2 or the necessary second step, and a much more difficult one, is to answer the question, "What exactly produces these effects?" We will seek to isolate and identify the critical variables consistently associated with individual change. The impact of at least five factors on marathon Gestalt workshop outcomes need to be explored in future research efforts: (a) time duration and time structure; (b) specific workshop processes; (c) member characteristics; (d) leader characteristics; and (e) post-workshop environments and experiences (some may extinguish gain while others may add to the permanence of change or foster additional change). Much remains to be discovered if we are to know the potent factors that promote psychological growth (and reinforce its stability over time) and make this form of marathon group effective.

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